

The state of ornithology in eastern Asia

by Earl of Cranbrook

I take as my allotted geographical limits that sector of Asia lying south of about 45°N and east of about 95°E (but not including far eastern U.S.S.R.), bounded on its Pacific flank by the outer islands of Japan, the Philippines and Indonesia. This is a region marked by great diversity in the natural environment and wide variety in the history and social systems of its human inhabitants. It is also a region within which war, revolution or military insurgency have been prevalent, locally or at large, for the past 40 years or more and emergent nationalism has tended too often to inhibit communication across frontiers. Much has occurred to impede the advance of ornithology and few common trends can be identified.

In this region, only Japan can show the full range of ornithological activities and supporting institutions familiar to us in the United Kingdom. Widespread popular appreciation of birds exists, reflected in a literature covering aesthetics, conservation, field identification, etc. Discs of bird song are available commercially. There is an academically oriented Ornithological Society, founded in 1912, which publishes the journal *Tori* and has produced 5 successive editions of a national checklist. The latest revision of this checklist, which took 7 years to prepare, was supported by the goodwill of a publishing company and a grant in aid from the Ministry of Education. It consists of Japanese and English language texts, separately bound, with a loose *Addenda and corrigenda* accompanying the second printing (Ornithological Society of Japan 1975).

Birds have been ringed in Japan since 1924. Initially attention was concentrated on waterfowl but — as appropriate in the country which gave the mist-net to the world — subsequent ringing studies have involved birds of all kinds. Current ornithological research is sponsored by organisations including government agencies and universities. Also active is the Yamashina Institute for Ornithology and Zoology, a research institution which owes its foundation to private charity and, among other things, houses an important museum collection.

Before World War II, Japanese ornithologists contributed significantly to studies of the birds of more southerly parts of the region (e.g., Taiwan, Philippines, Java), playing a part comparable to that of ornithologists of Europe in their counterpart tropical zone (i.e., Africa). Since the war, Japan has not yet re-emerged in this role. In the main, in tropical southeast Asia, the innovative work of recent years has been initiated by 'expatriates of non-Asian domicile, temporarily or more or less enduringly resident in the region.

It was from a base in Japan that, in 1963, one such venture — the Migratory Animal Pathological Survey (MAPS) — was launched (McClure 1974). Although the ultimate source of funds at times raised political awkwardness (see Bourne 1975, for example), through 18 institutes or individuals in 10 nations of eastern Asia (as defined above) MAPS successfully promoted ornithological research based on bird-ringing. During 7 years of funding, participants ringed 1,165,288 birds of 1218 species. Apart from the records of movements provided by over 6000 recoveries, the handling of so many birds of itself yielded a quantity of papers on many aspects of ornithology.

In Korea, the pioneer national ornithologist was Won Hong-Koo (1887-1970). After the division of his country, Dr. Won remained in the north, continuing his research from Pyongyang. In South Korea, MAPS funds assisted existing (and still continuing) ornithological research led by his son, Won Pyong-Oh, director of the Institute of Ornithology at Kyung Hee University, Seoul. Won Pyong-Oh, with the support of the Forest Research Institute, published in 1969 an annotated checklist (in Korean) and in 1971, jointly with the British diplomat M. E. J. Gore, a bilingual handbook of the birds of Korea. Despite these developments, in both Koreas ornithology remains an academic pursuit rather than a popular movement.

This is true also in China where, according to the estimate of Professor Cheng Tso-Hsin (=Zheng Zuoxin), director of the ornithological division of the Peking Zoological Research Institute, Chinese Academy of Sciences, there are 50-100 professional ornithologists and perhaps 200-300 amateurs. Because there is no national ornithological organisation, even these figures are conjectural (Cheng 1979a). Professor Cheng's own considerable contribution, in collaboration with the staff of his division, has followed the traditions of taxonomic geography. Of the main faunistic works produced, Cheng (1973) is available in English but a 1964 checklist (Cheng 1976) and the 2 volumes of the handbook so far published (Cheng 1978, 1979b) exist only in Chinese. Ornithologists unable to read Chinese script can turn to the illustrated work on the non-passerines by F. Etchécopar and the late F. Hüe (1978); no passerine companion volume is yet available. Vaurie (1972) has treated the fauna of Tibet (=Xizang), an area which is at present the subject of multi-disciplinary investigation; preliminary results (including ornithological studies) will be reported at a symposium sponsored by Academia Sinica, to be held in Peking in May 1980.

For Taiwan, non-nationals have written the most comprehensive classical treatment of the island's birds (Hachisuka & Udagawa 1950-51) and recent pocket guides (Severinghaus, Kang & Alexander 1970, Severinghaus & Blackshaw 1976), with national collaborators in the two last instances. In the 1976 *New Guide*, the authors wrote of an increasing interest in native wild birds among many sectors of the community, including scientists and students, government agencies and the public in general: 'Bird-watching is a popular form of outdoor recreation and outdoor recreation is an increasingly important industry in Taiwan'.

In Hong Kong, for years ornithology has been the pursuit of a small body of enthusiasts. A natural history society existed until 1941, publishing a journal. After the war, the Hong Kong Bird-Watching Society was formed and, since 1958, has published an annual report. The major faunistic work is that of Herklots (1953, reprinted 1965). This has been updated by successive editions of an annotated checklist published by H.K.B.W.S., in 1960, 1966 and — the third and most recent revision — in 1975 by M. A. Webster. Webster (1976) has also produced a pocket guide with English text.

The islands of the Philippines have attracted many ornithological expeditions. The U.S. administration also built up local collections, unfortunately destroyed in World War II. The war was, however, the stimulus for a comprehensive guide in the Pacific World series (Delacour & Mayr 1946), based chiefly on material in American museums. Among local ornithologists, the late C. Manuel, G. Alcasid and D. S. Rabor were prominent post-war;

the two last named participated in the MAPS programme. The task of preparing an updated review of the avifauna was then undertaken by a comparative new-comer, J. E. duPont (1971, 1976). His handsome book is essentially an illustrated handlist, lacking information on habits or behaviour.

In the tragic region of Indochina, recent years have provided few opportunities for ornithological study. Service personnel with the U.S. and allied forces included several people with ornithological interests, and Wildash (1968) took advantage of a diplomatic posting to compile a handbook of the birds of South Vietnam, listing 586 species. The region is also covered by the profusely illustrated guide by King, Woodcock and Dickinson (1975), which treats the whole of continental S. E. Asia.

Burma, likewise covered by King *et al.* (1975), has as yet no indigenous school of ornithology, although leading personalities, including the head of state, take a general interest in wildlife. Fortunately, Smythies (1953) brought together all published (and many otherwise unpublished) observations from the period before 1948. In time, this attractive book (now out of print) will provide a sound base on which local ornithologists will be able to build.

Lying between Burma and Indochina, and stretching from over 20°N to below 6°N, geographical factors give Thailand a rich and varied avifauna, currently numbered at 849 species. This drew the attention of the late H. G. Deignan, whose studies culminated in a checklist (1963). His publications provided the systematic groundwork on which the local naturalist and conservationist, Boonsong Lekagul, based his first *Bird Guide of Thailand* (1968), a pocket guide of which he was both author and illustrator. In the preparation of the 84 plates depicting 828 species, the author drew on his own field work and his important private collection of bird skins. Additional impetus to ornithological research in Thailand was provided by the transfer of MAPS central office to SEATO headquarters in Bangkok, in 1966. With MAPS support, fieldwork initiated by B. King was continued and extended by the late Kitti Thonglongya, at the Applied Scientific Research Corporation of Thailand (ASRCT). In 1968, Kitti enjoyed the unusual experience of trapping a distinctive (and, on zoogeographical grounds, unexpected) new bird species, a river martin of a genus (*Pseudochelidon*) previously unknown outside Africa. Records of distribution and habits of birds deriving from work done during this period by the professionals at SEATO, ASRCT and the Royal Thai Forest Department, together with amateurs, were incorporated in the second edition of the *Bird Guide* (Lekagul & Cronin 1974). In Bangkok a small bird-club holds together the amateur interest.

The most southerly provinces of Thailand show zoogeographical affinity with the adjoining states of Peninsular Malaysia. This area (including also Singapore) was recognised as a faunistic unit by H. C. Robinson (1927) when defining the scope of his projected 5 volume *Birds of the Malay Peninsula*. After the appearance of the first 2 volumes the progress of this enterprise was interrupted by Robinson's death (in 1929), and after the next 2 by the death of his successor, F. N. Chasen (in 1942). The series was finally completed by Medway & Wells (1976) (see also Wells & Medway 1976). In this concluding volume, the authors reviewed the recent history of local

ornithology. During the first dozen years after World War II, a handful of field ornithologists in Malaya and Singapore worked with high productivity, reporting their observations mainly in the *Bulletin* of the Raffles (later National) Museum, Singapore, or in the *Malayan Nature Journal*, organ of the Malayan Nature Society which had been formed shortly before the onset of war and was revived in 1947. The late C. A. Gibson-Hill's checklists (1949, 1950) were important publications, providing the taxonomic background for A. G. Glenister's book (1951, reprinted in 1953, 1956 and, with revisions, 1971). Mist-nets began to be used in significant numbers in 1958-59 and, with MAPS support, in 1963 a national bird-ringing project was established from a base in the then recently-founded University of Malaya. Since 1962, annual bird reports have been published in the *Malayan Nature Journal*. Today, at universities and research institutes in Peninsular Malaysia, ornithology is comparatively strong, involving for instance studies of single species, community ecology and energetics. Amateur participation is largely coordinated through state branches of the Malayan Nature Society or, as in Singapore, a specialised splinter group.

In 1972 the former Raffles Museum was closed as a centre for biological research and its reference collections were transferred to the care of the Department of Zoology, University of Singapore. Permanent housing for this material has yet to be provided. Included among these collections are the important series of bird skins obtained by Robinson, Chasen and their collaborators in the region of western Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, i.e., the Sunda Shelf. Chasen's own studies led to the production of a regional checklist (1935). This in turn provided the taxonomic groundwork for another contribution in the Pacific World series, J. Delacour's (1947) *Birds of Malaysia*. In many parts of the Sunda region, this book has not yet been superseded.

Of the Greater Sunda Islands, only Borneo has been the subject of a more recent bird book. This was produced in Sarawak, where in 1947 the incoming British administration appointed a keen ornithologist (the late Tom Harrison) to the curatorship of the museum at Kuching. During 1951-54, with the financial support of the late Loke Wan Tho — himself a productive amateur ornithologist — Sarawak museum staff expended considerable effort in amassing some 7300 bird skins. In 1956, B. E. Smythies catalogued this material. He subsequently drew on this collection, with others in overseas museums, to provide data for a checklist (1957) and book (1960, second edition in 1968) covering the avifauna of the entire island of Borneo. Currently there is no professional ornithologist at work in the Malaysian states of Sarawak or Sabah, nor in Brunei, but in all 3 states visitors and resident amateurs benefit from the collections held in the state museums and find outlets for publication in locally-produced journals (*Sarawak Museum Journal*, *Brunei Museum Journal*, and *Journal of the Sabah Society*).

In Indonesia, the collections at the Museum Zoologicum at Bogor survived both World War II and the turbulent years following the declaration of independence. The late A. Hoogerwerf (1949a) published a local guide, which is useful in the general region of western Java. Among other works, he also contributed two long papers on the oology of Java; these contain much information on breeding and breeding seasonality (Hoogerwerf 1949b, Hellebrekers & Hoogerwerf 1967). After his death, part of Hoogerwerf's

collection went to Bogor, part to the Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie at Leiden, Netherlands. Here too was deposited the important collection of M. Bartels, which provided much of Hoogerwerf's data and has also been drawn upon by others, including the Indonesian ornithologist, S. Somadikarta. Somadikarta also took part in the MAPS programme, concentrating particularly on the nesting colonies of the cormorants and ardeids on Pulau Dua, Banten.

The zoological journal of the Bogor museum (*Treubia*) was revived after the war, and has published papers on local ornithology. The natural history society of Indonesia was also reconstituted for a time in the post-war period. Its journal *Tropische Natuur* was revived in 1952 and survived (from 1954 under the name *Penggemar Alam*) until 1961; the contents included ornithological notes. In 1973 a small, Jakarta-based ornithological society was formed and in 1975 the first number of its journal *Kukila* appeared. I have been told that a second number was issued in 1976 (W. G. Harvey, per comm.), but there has been no further news of this venture and the society is now apparently defunct. Simple ornithological texts, including a brief pocket guide to commoner birds, exist in the Indonesian national language but, despite the sporadic efforts of enthusiastic individuals, the level of ornithological activity in Java at present is very low and elsewhere in the Republic is negligible.

The late C. M. N. White left an unfinished checklist of the birds of Wallacea, i.e. Celebes (=Sulawesi) and the Moluccas. It is hoped that this work can be edited and published in due course by the B.O.U., since it would be of value to ornithologists working in the central region of Indonesia. At the eastern extreme of this huge island nation (and of the sector of the world under review), the birds of the province of Irian Jaya (i.e., western New Guinea) have been treated by Rand & Gilliard (1967).

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Developments in Australian ornithology

by D. L. Serventy

Ornithology in Australia began with the arrival of the first settlers — in 1788 in the east with Governor Arthur Phillip's pioneers, and in 1829 in the west with Governor James Stirling's Swan River Settlement. But even prior to colonisation significant contributions to knowledge had been made by the naturalists attached to the great exploring expeditions — mainly British and French — in the latter years of the 18th Century. The first officials and settlers "exhibited a remarkable zest for natural history inquiry. Many had shared the vogue for natural history prevalent in England since the publication of Gilbert White's *Selborne* in 1789" and earlier publications. Thus the first major books published from these colonies were embellished with many fine hand-coloured engravings and useful text concerning